

Austria: Heimat and the Nazis

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Thomas Bernhard was a prominent 20th-century Austrian author who was often heavily critical of Austrian society. The most well-known example of this was his play *Heldenplatz* (1988), written on the 50th anniversary of the *Anschluss* with Germany. While a continuation of his critical look at Austrian society, which is prominent in his *oeuvre*, perhaps the most important aspect of this work is the fact that Bernhard raised the issue of Austria's Nazi past at a time when it was becoming a national issue, forcing the population to confront it, often unwillingly. As Bernhard points out, the Austrian society as a whole seems to have been susceptible not only to the influence of Nazism, but unable to hold itself accountable.

However in his earlier works, such as *die Ursache* (1975), Bernhard describes the Austria where he grew up, and points many of the fatal flaws that may have contributed to Austria's problematic political landscape, which focused much more on his own personal experience and issues with Austrian society, touching on a wide range of topics. In his later works, namely *Heldenplatz*, Bernhard narrows the focus significantly by choosing to focus on Austria's Nazi legacy. After consulting both the original German texts and scholarly secondary sources, I will examine how factors such as the time period in which he wrote these pieces, the literary form he used to present his work, and the way he addresses the issues presented show that Bernhard seems to conclude that Nazism, and the lack of addressing it, is the central issue in Austrian society during his life.